

Ed 770A: Learning & Design, I – Fall '04

Dr. Linda Polin – Cadre X

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Overview

This course is the critical foundation course of the program. It initiates the Year One discussion of central program ideas of “education” and “technology” and their intersection in the workplace, whether that workplace is among children or adults, formal or informal.

This course will contrast cognitive and sociocultural views of learning, the implications of each for the design of learning environments and the use of technology in design. The course runs two semesters. In the first, we will focus primarily on the theoretical constructs, with some consideration of implications for design. In the second semester design, itself will be foregrounded. Theory will be extended, though largely through discussion and application in design projects.

As a whole, this two-part course will introduce you to a sociocultural theory of learning and encourage you to use this lens to investigate and improve learning in your workplace. The role of technology is implicit in that remark. Whether pencils or streaming video, technology is always with us as we work and live. In this course we will, however, make the implicit (or tacit) explicit (or overt) in order to study it.

I believe the syllabus is a proposition from the instructor to the class. It is a negotiable, living document, and I have never made it through a semester without changing a syllabus in fairly significant ways. I used to post my syllabus as a webpage and “version” it; however, last year a colleague stole my prose and used it in a book she wrote. As a result, I no longer post prose I care about in easily accessible places. (If you’ve been to my homepage you’ve figured out that I’ve removed my publications and papers.) When we make changes to the syllabus I will reissue it as a version-numbered PDF file, uploaded in our Tapped In classroom (CX).

NOTE: If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Lauren Breeding, Director of Disability Services, for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs (310-506- 6500)

Class Discussion

There are three arenas for discussion: face-to-face class sessions, Tapped In synchronous chats, and asynchronous threaded discussions called newsgroups. Your participation is expected in all three.

Asynchronous (threaded discussion) in Newsgroups

Course newsgroup (ng): pep.qsep.ed770.cx

Recommended ng viewer: [Mozilla Thunderbird](#)

About Posting. Probably the most important class process in this class is the newsgroup discourse process. In newsgroups you should post thoughtful notes that question, extend, apply, or challenge ideas from readings, ‘real life’ experience, remarks I’ve made, or postings and remarks made by peers.

NG is where most of the intellectual work of the course takes place. You have time to craft a thoughtful response and time to read everyone else's remarks on the subject before you do. Newsgroups are a hybrid of prose and talk. I do not want you to write careful essays offline and upload them to the newsgroup. I want you to write directly in newsgroups, responding to postings that move you to think and speak. Avoid vacuous responses; instead try to move the conversation forward. You do not get points for having lots of posts, though you definitely get dinged for not posting enough.

So how much is enough? This is your primary means of interaction. At minimum I'd guesstimate 3-5 contributions a week. Many people will post more. Think of it this way: can you imagine being in a doctoral seminar and making only two or three remarks in each class session?

Writing and Thinking

I have heard students say, "Sure. I learn a lot just from listening to other people in class. I can learn a lot just from reading what people say." Unfortunately for you, I don't believe that. I think you can learn a little bit from listening to a class, but...well no I don't. I think you have the opportunity to learn from listening, but unless you work over the idea that you get from listening, unless you try to do something with it, to understand it actively, I don't think it offers more than an opportunity to learn. So how do you actively learn from passively listening? You have to talk or write about your own thinking in response to what you've heard/read. We're humans and language is a primary tool for us, a huge and powerful main tool for making sense. (That's partly what makes language learning in school so political.)

In the early 80s I was a researcher in the field of composition theory. New ground was being broken in our understanding of teaching and learning writing. The notion of writing as a thinking process came out of that era. Yes, writing IS thinking; it forces you to find words for otherwise vague thoughts. You think while you write; your writing reveals your thinking. For all of us to understand each other and ourselves we rely on language, even as we use it to convey images through metaphor or experiences through analogy.

You are in a doctoral program and writing is going to be an important part of your schooling. For some of you writing is a painful and difficult task. The best way to learn to write is to do it lots and lots of times, and to read writing like the kind you are trying to do.

I have three little preferences with regard to newsgroups. First, with rare exception I expect the tone to be informal and conversational. Don't carefully write and edit essays to post in newsgroups. I'm not a stickler about spelling and grammar, but let's try to use the built-in spell checker when we know we don't know how to spell a word. Second, whenever possible make explicit reference to readings and offer page numbers where relevant. This helps us keep the postings more scholarly in content despite their conversational voice. And third, when responding to another person's post, try to pare down the quoted original message to just the part(s) to which you are responding. We don't need to see the whole original again, but we also do need some context for your response.

Writing Assistance

We have limited writing assistance available to you as a graduate student. Michelle French, who has run the writing workshops and support center for years, has begun offering support and assistance in her own office in Tapped In. She has regular hours, but will also meet with individual students on an appointment basis. Michelle also offers optional writing workshops the early part of the first day of each face-to-face session in WLA, if we request it.

Synchronous (Chat) in Tapped In

Tapped In (TI) meeting space: room CX

Chat is not Writing

Chat, whether it occurs in a private IM or crowded virtual landscaped like TI, is not prose. It is speech; it is oral. It happens to be written down only because of the historical technical constraints of our online tools for interaction. In chat you will see linguistic constructions that read like utterances. Indeed, it is no coincidence that we refer to the written record as a transcript. And, when you read a Tapped In transcript you find it as confusing, redundant, grammatically incorrect, and amusing as the transcription of a real world conversation would be. Yet, in the moment of its real time construction, it will have made complete sense. (This is one conundrum I am still endeavoring to understand through serious research.)

TI is our coffee house chat space. We brainstorm; we engage in rapid-fire spontaneous interactions; we share a social presence. Spelling doesn't matter; as long as we can figure out your meaning, you're fine. Nonverbal gestures (LindaX raises an eyebrow.) are welcomed. You will get used to TI. There is no way to prepare you for it. If it gets rolling too fast, say so and we'll slow it down. I sometimes ask that we all stop and sit on our hands and read what's been written on the screen.

We will evolve our social conventions in online, but a few tips may help us get off to a good start. If you wish to chat with friends, try to do this before class is scheduled to begin. Please keep whispering and paging to a minimum, especially to me. Please take short turns; don't spend a minute typing out a lengthy speech. If you have prepared text you want to share, investigate how to create notes or write on the whiteboard in Tapped In. To indicate that you have more to say, the convention is to end your line with ellipses, like this... However, I have a bad habit of using ellipses to indicate a trailing off of my voice, as if I were dissolving into mumbling. If I finish talking and no one seems to be responding, sometimes I'll post a period to indicate I'm really truly done.

Our TI day for this class is Wednesday. Your times are 6 a.m. and 7 p.m., Pacific Time. These dates are tentative. Some sessions might end up being optional office hours. We'll see. I do not attempt to conduct the same "class" in the early and late TI sessions. The early group and late group will discuss different, albeit related, topics. This serves two functions. First, it makes you read the other group's transcript. Second, it keeps the discussion fresh.

Tapped In Schedule

We may cancel one here or there. This is the most I'd ever ask of you. I like to start of strong to be sure we are all getting it down and getting it done.

- SEPT >> 8, 15, 22
- OCT >> 13, 27
- NOV >> 3, 17
- DEC >> 1

Readings

Pace your reading. I will not tell you to be on page X by a certain date. If we're reading Lave and Wenger over a three-week period, I'm going to assume you're at least 1/3 of the way through each week. Sometimes you'll be ahead; sometimes you'll be behind. We don't have a lot of readings but they do require engagement; they are difficult. My fantasy about how you would read them goes something like this.

The kids are in bed, or at least off doing their own thing. You fix yourself a cup of chai tea/coffee or a glass of wine. You sit in your favorite reading spot with the course book of the moment, and a pen/pencil/highlighter, and a journal/stickies/laptop. Maybe you put on a headset with some tunes...alternative rock? ambient? jazz? whatever. This is YOUR time to read and think.

You are paying a lot of money for this education. Make time for it. Give yourself priority in your life.

How to Read

Don't complain about the readings. You're just rusty. You've been reading Oprah's book club or trade books or nothing. Time to fire up the neurons. Drink Gingko Biloba tea. Remember, the authors aren't writing textbooks for you. They're writing to other members of THEIR professional community, and they tend to assume particular background knowledge.

Read like a dolphin swims. Some sections you skim through, with your head up looking where you're going; some sections you dive deep and spend some time carefully reading through the text. The first time through YOU should be looking for the big ideas, trying to get the gist of the authors' intent. Look at the headings; they are usually very, very helpful for orienting you to the logical construction the writers are trying to make. Be wary of underlining as you read; sometimes you won't know what's important till after you've passed over it. When you finish a section, pause to reflect. Maybe jot a note in the margins so you can find that section again. Dog-ear pages. Take notes. Ask questions and offer interpretations in ngs.

Reading and Newsgroups

I expect a particular kind of posting in newsgroups. I expect everyone to do this. In fact, if you don't, it hurts your grade. I expect writing about reading. After ten years of online instruction I have a very clear sense of what to expect and what works best when students write about reading.

AS YOU ARE READING a book, you will encounter sections that excite you because

You agree enthusiastically with the author.

You disagree vehemently with the author

You are puzzled or confused by what the author has written.

Cite these sections (quote 'em and give page numbers) in newsgroups and share your thinking about your reaction to the section.

Core Readings

Finish HPL by mid-September. It's not a hard book and you have been exposed to this sort of language in your undergrad psych course. We will spend most of September on this text.

How People Learn – Bransford, Brown, & Cocking

ISBN: 0-309-07036-8

Also available at: <http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/>

Get rolling on this at least the week before f2f in Sept. It is a very short book, but it is very difficult, largely because the writing assumes a particular academic background. We will spend most of October on this text.

Situated Learning – Lave & Wenger

ISBN: 0-521-42374-0

Optional readings

Pick one from Column A and one from Column B, for a total of two optional books. All of these books are easier reads than the two above. Those in Column B are especially so. These books will be our focus in November. Note, however, that Denning is one of our speakers in the Sept f2f. His book is one you could polish off on the airplane here. You will get a lot more out of his workshop if you've read the book.

A. Practice	B. Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Learning Together</i> – Rogoff, Turkanis, & Bartlett (eds) <p>K-12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Deep Learning for a Digital Age</i> – Weigel <p>higher ed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>The Springboard</i> – Denning (our F2F guest speaker)<i>The Tipping Point</i> – Gladwell

- *Working Knowledge* – Davenport & Prusak
organizations

- *Smart Mobs* - Rheingold

Tasks and Grading

There are three tasks or assignments due this semester. There is a fourth task which you will begin this semester and finish next semester.

Diagnosing the Workplace	20%
Designing for Learning	20%
Sharing Knowledge	30%
Participation/Discussion	30%

Diagnosing the Workplace - 20 % - due Oct 18

Analyze your immediate workplace as a place where learning occurs, based upon your reading and our discussions of Lave & Wenger's theory of situated learning and communities of practice. We will discuss more in class, but the general idea is to use the language and ideas of L&W to look for and critically assess features of the workplace community.

You will identify learning in that setting, and examine how (or whether and why not) the context, activities, participants and artifacts (tools, signs, and symbols) shape learning in that setting. I expect you to go so far as to conduct appropriate, albeit informal, interviews; Google the 'Net; conduct participant observations; and perhaps even surf through our digital library to see what others have written about this context for learning.

The product will be an essay of seven pages max., not counting any appendix material. Submit the document to me as an MS WORD file, with the .doc extension. I will give you extensive feedback, embedded in your Word file and you will revise the document for a final grade.

Where You're Starting >> What are people trying to do? What sort of variation is there in the way it is done? Are participants differently skilled and informed? Are there "experts" or "old timers"? Are there newbies? How do folks gain access to the practice? How do they learn? Who do they hope to become? How is tacit knowledge made available to newcomers? On balance is this a successful practice community or is it dysfunctional? How do you know? What sorts of tools, signs, symbols carry knowledge in this practice? How have they evolved with the work? How is the history of the practice revealed in its current activities and artifacts?

Where You're Going >> Figure out how newbies transform and develop in this community (and the role of technology in this process). Figure where/how/whether technological tool(s) support the practice. Where are the glitches? What could be modified for greater effectiveness? Can the practice itself be improved and how might technological tools help that along?

Designing for Learning – 20% - due Nov 22

Propose a technical design to support the workplace community by finding a tool, activity, or other element that can be used by your workplace to better support a peer-to-peer interaction, and access to expertise in practice (a community approach to learning and the development of practice). You might decide to investigate blogging; and then think about how it supports a sociocultural view of learning, and how it might be deployed in your workplace. Or, you might begin with a specific workplace problem, such as department silos (sequestered practice); search for a mechanism to open communication, and also end up with a blog or

portal tool/activity. You can start at either end of the task on this. However, the common parts of all efforts will be:

- *What*: Action (tool, action, construction, mechanism, structure, etc)
- *Why*: Object (what are you trying to accomplish)
- *How*: Connection to theory (how it functions; why it should work)

The technical solution you propose and share with the cadre can take any form as long as it responds to the points above.

Sharing Knowledge – 30 % (process & product) - due Dec 6

Co-construct and Share Knowledge on your optional books. Each book you choose must have at least two other co-readers. That is, I want to have reading groups of at least three members. Figure out your books and buddies at or before the end of September. Get my approval if the book is not one of the ones I've suggested.

Now, spend the semester, probably the second half, reading the book as a group. By this I mean reading and discussing in newsgroups and/or Tapped In. This does NOT mean that you divide up the book and each person reads a part of it! Everyone must read the whole thing. Find a way to make your collaborative work visible to me, e.g., through transcripts in TI or access to a threaded discussion in TI or in newsgroups (happy to make a newsgroup for your use, btw). Remember, I'm as interested in the process as the product. I expect you to negotiate meaning as a group, not to completely defer to some one person to determine the value/sense/meaning of the book.

That's the easy part. The hard part is figuring out (a) what the 'take away' is from the book; that is, what's worth remembering; and (b) how to share that effectively with your cadre mates. You see, this assignment lets us cover a lot of textual ground without killing ourselves by trying to read a million books. But, we have to figure out how to share what's been learned with each other. I'm open to any and all ideas...except sock puppets and interpretive dance. Smart groups will figure out how to USE or MODEL or DEMONSTRATE what they've learned rather than TELL what they've learned. =wink, wink; nudge, nudge=

Learn Something – start now; finish next semester (graded next semester)

Your mission is to learn something new that you want to learn. It can be almost anything: quilting, ballroom dancing, gourmet cooking, horseback riding, golfing, Spanish, public speaking, home brewing... It CANNOT be something for work; if you choose Flash programming, it must be a personal desire to learn it, not a work-related need to learn it. It must be something you are highly motivated to learn to do, and you are very, very, strongly urged to do it with a friend, spouse, or family member who will also be engaged in the learning. The next couple of years are going to be intense, involve the spouse/sig other now in something enjoyable, if you can. You must have your choice approved by me before you leave WLA after the September face-to-face.

NEXT SEMESTER your final product will be a CD or DVD, of no more than 10 minutes viewing time, that shows HOW you learned, e.g., from peers, from readings, from artifacts, from group participation, etc. and how your identity shifted over time as you became more deeply involved in the practice. Now, it takes a while to actually LEARN something so your final product won't be due until late February. However, I will need a completed one-page template describing your intentions and resources. We'll develop this together at our September F2F.

I will ask for an informal progress report in the middle of the semester.

Tips for Success with Dr. Polin

These are the things I value in learners. Some of this will be assessed as participation; hopefully some of it will be evident in your project work and online interactions with classmates and me. Participation means helping others, as well as being open to assistance from people who can help you. Participation means interactions with the entire range of "stuff"

in our class not just me, but also peers, relevant outsiders, texts (from many sources), tools, places, and objects used in class. In some vague way, I want to sense you leaning forward in your chair, trying earnestly to interact with us and the "things" in our world that make up the larger context of our class together

- Intellectual and spiritual engagement
- Useful, consistent involvement
- Dependable support and assistance to classmates
- Patience, flexibility, and perseverance
- Ingenuity, curiosity, and challenge
- Open-mindedness and flexibility
- Willingness to take the long view
- Well-written prose
- Use of metaphor and analogy
- Efforts to try out new ideas, a.k.a. informed risk-taking

Things that will Tend to Work Against You in My Classes...

Late work. I hate late work. It messes up my delicately balanced working mommy schedule. If you do something after the time it was due, you've ruined the whole point of doing it. In fact, don't even turn it in if it's late. Don't be M.I.A. in newsgroups and then one day log in and post 12 messages on threads that have ceased to be in play. Don't expect me to consider that as participating in class.

Hapless Victims. *Okay, your hard drive blows up. Okay, you have a meeting you can't get out of. Okay, the aunt who raised you from a pup is in the ICU...* Some people always have a story. I only buy it once. Each successive instance of a story paints a picture of you as a professional victim. Got a problem? Work it out. Figure out a way around it. Anticipate your life. I have yet to encounter hapless victims who were genuinely bad luck folks. Every time I've had a hapless victim in the past ten years of teaching in this program, that person has been a slacker, a weasel, a shirker, whatever word you want to use. As a result, I'm awfully hard to impress. We've had people go through this program while on chemo for breast cancer, while working through a surprise divorce, while escaping abusive spouses, while dealing with drug addicted college children needing assistance. They have met their obligations and done well. Don't tell me you can't make class or do your work on time because you have a meeting. And never ask me if it's "okay" to miss something. If I thought that were true I wouldn't do the thing in the first place.

Attitude. Don't bring attitude. Open your mind. Listen; don't just wait to talk. Don't show off; share without trying to impress. If you're not here to learn then there are cheaper places for you to go to validate your existing knowledge.

Fear. Don't hide. Don't be afraid to make mistakes or be embarrassed. We all screw up at some point when we're learning new things, and when you're learning online that tends to happen in public. Let it go; move on. We already forgot about it.

Whining. Don't whine. It's a toss up which annoys me more: whining or attitude. If you have a problem with something, don't tell me "everybody thinks blah blah blah." Tell me what YOU think and tell me now.

Hoarding. If you know/have something useful, share it. Don't hoard knowledge or resources. This class is not based on competition. It's possible for everyone to get an A...or a C.

I not only use all the brains I have, but all that I can borrow.

Attributed to President Woodrow Wilson

None of us is as smart as all of us
Attributed to Phil Condit (Boeing)

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